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E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/28/2016  
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SUBJECT: FM LIVNI'S AUGUST 22-23 VISIT TO PARIS

Classified By: POLITICAL MINISTER COUNSELOR JOSIAH ROSENBLATT FOR REASON 1.5 (b) and (d)

1. (C) SUMMARY: In separate read-outs of FM Livni's August 22-23 visit to France, French Middle East A/S Equivalent Jean Felix-Paganon and Israeli CDA Rafael Barak both emphasized that Livni was adamant on the need for full implementation of UNSCR 1701, given the explosive regional context. She stressed the need for a rapid deployment of UNIFIL and support from the international community to prevent the rearming of Hizballah. She refrained, however, from pressing France on a force commitment. Livni and the French agreed to coordinate on a possible second UNSC resolution and the establishment of a sanctions committee. The French underlined the need to target suppliers rather than hold the Lebanese or UNIFIL responsible for cross-border re-armament of Hizballah.

Livni expressed concern that the French had been overly solicitous of Lebanese views during the negotiations on UNSCR 1701, seeing little need to remain in touch with Israel, a role it relegated to the U.S. Livni made clear that Israel was not prepared to negotiate on Shebaa Farms pending progress on dealing with the threat posed by Hizballah. Despite some differences, both sides expressed general satisfaction with the state of the bilateral relationship, and were confident that the improvement of the past year would be preserved.

2. (C) On the Palestinian issue, Livni underscored Israel's determination to formulate its own plan given that international efforts had shown few fruits to date, while French officials expressed qualified support for the Arab League proposal of a UNSC meeting on the Middle East. On Syria, Felix-Paganon claimed that other Europeans' efforts to engage the SARG were indirectly responsible for the SARG's hard line on monitoring of the Syria-Lebanon border. END SUMMARY

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French Read-Out of Livni Visit  
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3. (C) In an August 24 meeting with the Charge, Middle East A/S Equivalent Jean Felix-Paganon characterized Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni as a constructive interlocutor who spoke frankly to GOF officials (PM de Villepin, FM Douste-Blazy, Minister Nicolas Sarkozy and Socialist Party First Secretary, Francois Hollande) about Israeli concerns regarding the need for immediate and full implementation of UNSCR 1701. Her visit to Paris, as the French saw it, was intended chiefly to highlight the urgent need for a rapid deployment of UNIFIL and an effective plan to stop the rearmament of Hizballah. Felix-Paganon said Livni had

stressed that the Olmert government was facing mounting domestic pressure about its handling of the conflict and that the GOI had already risked a great deal by agreeing to UNSCR 1701, uncharacteristically turning a vital security role over to the international community. Livni, he commented, was clearly personally very invested in the Security Council Resolution and would continue to play an active role in its execution.

¶4. (C) According to MFA officials, Livni implicitly criticized France's inattentiveness to Israeli concerns throughout the negotiation of 1701. The GOF had advocated Lebanese interests, often to the detriment of Israel's. Felix-Paganon said that GOF officials had explained that they shared many of Israel's views and that France's promotion of a stable, fully sovereign Siniora government was ultimately in the interest of all the concerned parties. If the French negotiating position in NY seemed at times to favor the Lebanese, this was because the GOF had believed this was in everyone's wider interest. Furthermore, French officials had explained that, given that the U.S. had naturally taken the lead in explaining the Israeli position to the Security Council, it had therefore been incumbent on France to fully reflect the GOLs. French officials, he said, explained that they had been actively sympathetic to Israel's concerns throughout the crisis, and had only sought to produce a UNSCR that was acceptable to all sides, while also avoiding a collapse of the Siniora government. Felix-Paganon asserted that Israel had not made a serious effort to communicate with Paris during the negotiations.

¶5. (C) Felix-Paganon noted that Livni, while stressing the importance of UNIFIL's rapid deployment, was careful not to pressure France on its own commitment of forces. Her message, he said, was that credible forces needed to go in quickly, as foreseen in UNSCR 1701. The arms embargo issue was Livni's other priority. Felix-Paganon said French officials engaged positively with her on the possibility of a UN sanctions committee to address implementation of commitments made in paragraph 15 of 1701. Felix-Paganon said the GOF was looking into the technicalities of setting up such a committee. He provided no further details, nor did he identify the authority under which such a committee would operate. He said that French officials had stressed their view that the GOL should not be held responsible for arms coming into the country; rather, the focus of international sanctions should be on point of origin states. Expanding on this point, Felix-Paganon commented that the GOF was looking at the potential of using 1701 to go after Iran and Syria. He also noted that the EU would soon take the necessary implementing action with regard to the embargo provisions of ¶1701.

¶6. (C) Livni had laid down three key Israeli positions that needed to be clear to all the players, according to Felix-Paganon. First, Israel would not recall all of its troops from Southern Lebanon until a reinforced UNIFIL had deployed to the region with the Lebanese Armed Forces. Felix-Paganon said that France understood the Israeli government's position; there was a need to ensure the area remained secure.

¶7. (C) Secondly, Livni insisted that Israel would not lift the air and maritime blockade until such time that an effective plan was in place to monitor the air and sea ports. Israel could not risk the rearmament of Hizballah, and these ports remained vulnerable to arms traffic. On this point, GOF officials had countered that there was little information that these were key points of entry for arms. Some problems persisted at Beirut airport to be sure, but PM Siniora's government was working to resolve them. The GOF had proposed that Israel differentiate between the airport's passenger and freight operations, allowing the resumption of passenger traffic. Livni responded that conditions did not exist for such action. French officials warned that the longer the blockade remained in place, the weaker the Siniora government's position domestically. How could the GOL claim sovereignty when it needed Israeli permission to use its own

air and sea ports?

¶8. (C) Lastly, MFA officials said, Livni affirmed that Israel is not now prepared to address a resolution of the Shebaa Farms issue. There would need to be significant progress on the threat of Hizballah, including through its disarmament, before her government would be in a position to consider negotiations. Israel, she emphasized, had already risked a great deal and was waiting for the international community to live up to its part of the bargain.

¶9. (C) Noting other EU member states' efforts to engage with the Syrians, Felix-Paganon said Chirac was convinced that President Asad was acting in bad faith. By engaging the Syrians, the misguided Europeans had given him an opportunity to reject UNSCR 1701. Asad's speech and his direct challenge concerning UNIFIL deployment to the border only proved Chirac's point. He stated that PM de Villepin would be taking up the issue with the Finns shortly. Felix-Paganon, jocular in tone, but serious in intent, noted how alone Chirac was in his policy to isolate Syria: "In Europe it's only France that is opposed to dialogue with Syria, and in France, it's only Chirac."

¶10. (C) Felix-Paganon noted that FM Livni, commenting on the Palestinian issue, stated that Israel had followed everyone else's lead for too long, with no progress. It was now time for Israel to formulate its own plan. She provided no clarifying details.

¶11. (C) The French expressed general support for the Arab League initiative to seek a UN Security Council meeting during the General Assembly that would focus on the Middle East. The French did not believe that there should be an operational outcome, however, the Security Council could show its concern simply by holding a meeting. Of course, Felix-Paganon added, the interlocutors from the Arab League should be serious ones; Syria, for instance, would not be a welcome speaker. FM Livni, he said, had asked the GOF to consult with Israel as thinking on such a meeting moved forward.

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Israeli Read-Out of Livni Visit  
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¶12. (C) Israeli Charge d'Affaires Rafael Barak, like the French, portrayed the visit in a generally positive light, but he noted that Jerusalem had been unhappy with French actions throughout the negotiation of UNSCR 1701. Barak noted that this had been the first crisis in a long time in which the French had a crucial role. They had been open and accessible throughout. However, the GOF had told Israel it would deliver the Siniora government on terms acceptable to Israel, and instead limited itself to presenting Lebanese interests at the Security Council. The resulting perception in New York of the U.S. supporting Israel and the GOF supporting Lebanon had not endeared the French to the GOI. In spite of all this, Barak said, France did share Israel's basic concerns and had not played the same difficult role as in the years of the Intifada. In recent months, the relationship between France and Israel had improved significantly and the animosity had dissipated. Common interests -- a disarmed Hizballah, a stronger central Lebanese government, and reduced Syrian influence -- had allowed the two governments to weather this crisis and keep the relationship intact.

¶13. (C) Livni, Barak said, was focused in her meetings on calling for the French to help implement 1701. With little to show, politically or militarily, for itself, and given domestic criticism, the GOI needed to make UNSCR 1701 a success. Barak said Livni's message was focused on UNIFIL deployment but stayed clear of putting pressure on the GOF to send additional troops. That said, Israel was disappointed by France's lack of military commitment to date. (Note: Barak was speaking before President Chirac's announcement of France's 2000 troop contribution.) Israel, like others in the international community, had expected France to take a

leading role in UNIFIL, in terms of command and numbers on the ground. He said Israel understood that Chirac was facing difficult military concerns and needed to consider the possible dangers to its troops as a result of its troubled relationships with Syria and Iran.

¶14. (C) The French called for the lifting of the blockade, to which Livni responded that her government needed more assurances on the monitoring of arms traffic. He confirmed that the GOF had asked that a differentiation be made between passenger and freight sides of the Beirut airport, to which the FM gave the general response that Israel could not make any more concessions until there was some sort of progress on the threat from Hizballah.

¶15. (C) FM Livni, Barak told us, was satisfied with the GOF response on the arms embargo. It had agreed that Israel would work with France in NY to come up with a new UNSCR or to identify other means, such as the creation of a sanctions committee. On Shebaa, Barak said, the Israelis pre-empted the issue by bringing it up themselves and stating unequivocally that the time was not right for discussion with the GOI. The GOF side contented itself with noting that Shebaa remained a matter for future discussions.

¶16. (C) Barak explained that Livni had not limited herself to meeting with PM de Villepin and FM Douste-Blazy. On the Embassy's recommendation, and with an eye on the future, she also met with Nicolas Sarkozy and Francois Hollande (the latter in lieu of Segolene Royal or any of the other presidential candidates). Israel, he observed, needed friends in Europe right now and the GOI had to work harder to broaden its contacts.

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